



Montgomery County Council

From the office of Councilmember Cherri Branson

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Councilmember Cherri Branson's Statement on County's FY 2015 Approved Budget

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ROCKVILLE, Md., May 22, 2014—Montgomery County Councilmember Cherri Branson made the following statement today after the Council unanimously approved the Fiscal Year 2015 operating budget and six-year 2015-20 Capital Improvements Program:

I want to take this opportunity to thank my Council colleagues for their hard work over the last few months on the FY15 Operating Budget and Capital Improvements Program. I especially want to thank Council President Craig Rice for his leadership and careful consideration of the many competing priorities for limited resources.

A budget is a policy and priority document that transforms rhetoric into commitment. I support the Council's budget because I believe that it moves this County forward in fulfilling our commitments to our most vulnerable residents while assuring prudent fiscal policy.

As a member of the Council's Education Committee, I am grateful that this nearly \$5 billion budget fully funds Montgomery County Public Schools' educational programs without exceeding the Maintenance of Effort requirement and putting additional restraints on future budgets. I look forward to continuing to work together with members of the Board of Education and the Superintendent on our shared priorities: reducing educational disparities and closing the achievement gap.

This budget also provides the necessary resources to assure that Montgomery College obtains the funding it deserves, which includes \$2 million for the expansion of the College's Achieving Collegiate Excellence program, which provides support to high school students who are living in low-income households or are first-generation college students. Under the strong leadership of Dr. DeRionne Pollard, this incredible community asset will continue to provide world class educational

opportunities for our residents and a highly educated workforce for local businesses.

While increasing the funding available for education, the Council has also been able to reduce the property tax rate from \$1.01 per \$100 of assessed value to 99.6 cents. In addition to maintaining the \$692 property tax credit, the Council also reduced the 2010 increase in the Energy Tax by 7 percent. By reducing the burden on taxpayers and encouraging economic growth, we can continue to build our base and strategically reinvest in areas that were cut back drastically during the recession.

During the downturn, our County libraries faced steep cuts and I am pleased that the Council was able extend hours and add resources for materials. Libraries are critical community cornerstones that bring us together in pursuit of intellectual curiosity, job readiness, community engagement and lifelong learning.

This budget also prioritizes our shared desire to support working families and those who often struggle in silence. A strong middle class is essential for our continued growth as a County and it is important for us to understand the challenges we face and identify creative solutions to overcome them. It takes a holistic approach that addresses the wide range of needs of our residents. Expanding the Capital Area Food Bank's Family Markets Program, which provides fresh and nutritious foods in a market setting for children and families in high need areas, is an exciting partnership that will fight hunger and promote healthy lifestyle choices. Increasing funding for early childhood services, Linkages to Learning, Excel Beyond the Bell and mental and behavioral health programs are important steps in this mission, but we can not do it alone. The Council was able to partner with our incredible non-profit network through community grants that will provide resources to the organizations that serve our residents every day.

In addition to promoting education, maintaining financial flexibility and increasing access to libraries and nutritious food, this budget also continues our mission to increase mobility and connectivity, by investing in transportation infrastructure projects for our County's future. Maintaining our commitment to the Bikeshare program, Capital Crescent Trail, Silver Spring Green Trail and the Purple Line are significant because providing residents with multiple modes of transportation reduces traffic and improves access to jobs, amenities and public facilities. In District 5, the dedicated support of businesses and residents has strengthened the Silver Spring Parking Lot District, which will fund additional hours for the free VanGo bus service without added cost to the tax payer.

In conclusion, going through the process of finalizing the budget was a humbling experience, as it enabled me to touch the lives of so many organizations and individuals who are doing amazing work in our community. It is an honor for me to represent the residents of District 5 and I am proud to support this budget as a critical investment in our future.

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